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## Jubilee Worksheets

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## BEGINNING SOCIAL ANALYSIS

We have defined social analysis as "the effort to obtain a more complete picture of a social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships." We can go about that task by working through a series of four questions about the history, structures, values, and direction of the situation we are analyzing.

### A. WHAT IS THE MAIN LINE OF *HISTORY* OF THIS SITUATION?

1. What have been the major stages (periods) through which this situation has moved?
2. What dynamic patterns of development can be observed?
3. What have been key turning points in the development of the situation?
4. Can we name major events which have influenced the course of the history of this situation?

### B. WHAT ARE THE MAJOR *STRUCTURES* WHICH INFLUENCE THIS SITUATION?

1. What are the major *economic* structures which determine how society organizes *resources*? E.g.: production, distribution, exchange, consumption; capital, labor, technology; concentrations, conglomerates; tax policies, interest rates.
2. What are the major *political* structures which determine how society organizes *power*? E.g.: procedures of decision-making; access to public influence; formal: constitution, party, courts, military; informal: cliques, lobbying; participation patterns.
3. What are the major *social* structures which determine how society organizes *relationships* (other than those which are primarily economic and political *relationships*)? E.g.: family, clan, tribe; neighborhood; education, recreation; communications, media; language patterns.
4. What are the major *cultural* structures which determine how society organizes *meaning*? E.g.: religion; symbols, myths, dreams; art, music, folk-lore; lifestyle, traditions.

### C. WHAT ARE THE KEY *VALUES* OPERATIVE IN THIS STRUCTURE?

1. What are the "carriers" of values in society--persons, role models, institutions?
2. Examples of various sets of values: life, age/youth, unity/diversity, individualism/community, competition/cooperation, materialism/spiritualism, accumulation/sharing, participation/obedience, freedom/law and order, progress/stability, innovation/tradition, justice/security, peace/violence, equality/hierarchy

### D. WHAT IS THE FUTURE *DIRECTION* OF THIS SITUATION?

1. What are the most significant trends revealed in the present situation?
2. What can we "extrapolate" (i.e., project by inference) from the current scene?
3. If things keep going in the future the way they are going now, what will be the situation in ten years?
4. What are the sources of creativity and hope for the future in the present situation?

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis we have made will have opened up a variety and multiplicity of factors which influence the situation we are trying to understand. The final task is now to draw some conclusions, to be able to discern the most important elements in the situation. This requires that we look over the responses made to the four analytical questions and identify--by a process of ranking--the "root" elements. When the various elements have been prioritized, we need to make a second effort at ranking and draw some conclusions.

1. What are the two or three "root" elements most responsible for the current situation?
2. In whose interest do these root elements operate?

The advantage of doing this exercise in this way is that it does begin to open up the situation and reveal causes, consequences, linkages, trends, and related dimensions. It provides a holistic picture--dynamic in a historical perspective and interconnected in a structural perspective.

Adapted from *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, Orbis, 1990.

## WHY PEOPLE ARE POOR

The January 1981 issue of *Sojourners* included a milestone article by Tom Hanks under the above title. It begins with an observation of North American churches' understanding of the causes of poverty.

*The major cause of poverty is widely assumed to be "underdevelopment." Other prominent factors are believed to be laziness . . . , vices such as drunkenness, and, however subtly and discretely expressed, the supposed racial and national inferiority of certain peoples. It's a very comforting worldview and one that our most popular politicians delight to propagate.*

Hanks himself, an Old Testament scholar with now some 40 years of ministry in Latin America, has examined extensively what the Bible teaches about the causes of poverty. It says precisely nothing about underdevelopment and very little about "laziness, drunkenness, and other assorted causes." On the other hand, the Bible contains "an overwhelming avalanche of texts that identify oppression as the cause of poverty."

*Oppression is a major category in the Bible's understanding and approach to reality. The Exodus has come to be recognized as playing a central role in the theology of the O.T., comparable to that of the cross in the N.T. And it was in the Exodus that a people God recognized as oppressed won their liberation.*

*It is no exaggeration to say that 90 per cent of biblical history is written from the perspective of a small, weak, oppressed, poor people. Small wonder, then, that oppression and the resulting poverty form so large a bulk of the literature that recounts the struggle.*

*. . . The Lord makes clear that in a class struggle between oppressors and oppressed God does not remain neutral or impartial: God takes the side of the oppressed-poor and acts decisively for their liberation (Ex. 3:7-10; 6:2-5).*

*The Bible . . . abundantly witnesses its awareness of antagonistic classes and the struggle of the poor against their oppressors, particularly in Exodus, the references to "enemies" in the Psalms, and in the eighth century prophets.*

Hanks notes the long absence of social analysis of the causes of poverty in First World biblical theology and calls for a re-reading of the Bible from the Third World.

*In Latin America's theological and spiritual revolution, biblical Christians often are accused of introducing class struggle into the churches. This is utterly naïve and shows we have understood neither biblical social analysis nor the most elementary facts that are a daily part of Third World poverty.*

What are we called to do as biblical people?

*We need to stop justifying our privileges and start trying to discover, unmask, and denounce the mechanisms of oppression that make and keep people poor. . . . We need to examine radically our understanding of the Christian gospel and Jesus Christ. We must ask whether Christ is presented as liberator of the oppressed or as champion of an unjust status quo, and whether our gospel is "good news to the poor" or a rationalization for the rich.*

What is your own understanding of the causes of poverty--in the US and around the world?



## CHRISTIANITY AND THE DESTRUCTION OF NATURE

Ross and Gloria Kinsler

In his article on "Christianity and the Survival of Creation" in his book on *The Art of the Commonplace*, Wendell Berry explains that Christianity has been for over 500 years and continues to be largely complicit with or indifferent to "the rape and plunder of the world." Christians have made a radical disconnection between religion and economy, placing primary attention on the former and little on the latter. "Most Christian organizations are as happily indifferent to the ecological, cultural, and religious implications of industrial economics as are most industrial organizations. The certified Christian seems just as likely as anyone else to join the military-industrial conspiracy to murder Creation." (306)

Berry calls this dualism "the most destructive disease that afflicts us. In its best-known, its most dangerous, and perhaps its fundamental version, it is the dualism of body and soul." (313) Holiness is limited to God and the human soul. It excludes the human body and the rest of creation. "Modern Christianity generally has cut itself off from both nature and culture. It has no serious or competent interest in biology or ecology. And it is equally uninterested in the arts by which humankind connects itself to nature." (318)

So Christians are generally expected to give primary attention to the maintenance and growth of their churches and the "saving" of "the individual, isolated, and disembodied soul" and its heavenly afterlife. This kind of religion easily becomes a partner of the state and the economic status quo. "It has, for the most part, stood silently by while a predatory economy has ravaged the world, destroyed its natural beauty and health, divided and plundered its human communities and households. It has flown the flag and chanted the slogans of empire. . . . In its *de facto* alliance with Caesar, Christianity connives directly in the murder of Creation. For in these days, Caesar is no longer a mere destroyer of armies, cities, and nations. Caesar is a contradicter of the fundamental miracle of life. . . ." The empire prays, and churches everywhere compliantly pray. But the empire is praying to a God whose works it is prepared at any moment to destroy. (319)

Our urgent task now is "to learn to read and understand the Bible in the light of the present fact of Creation." (306) To overcome the radical disconnection between religion and economy, we must recover the sense of the holiness of all life. We can no longer tolerate economic practices that destroy life. As the Psalmist writes so eloquently, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it." (Psalm 24:1) "To be uninterested in economy is to be uninterested in the practice of religion; it is to be uninterested in culture and in character. Probably the most urgent question now faced by people who would adhere to the Bible is this: What sort of economy would be responsible to the holiness of life?" (309)

1. Consider the ways in which your faith is related to the survival of Creation.
2. Consider the ways your church's life is related to the survival of Creation.

## THE U.S. LEADS THE WORLD IN INCARCERATION RATES

Ross and Gloria Kinsler

The Christian *Century* notes (May 16, 2012) that the U.S. has only 6 percent of the world's population, but it has 25 percent of the world's prisoners. "Whereas the median incarceration rate among all countries is 125 prisoners per 100,000 people, the U.S. rate is 743 per 100,000—by far the highest in the world." (23) The U.S. spends \$200 Billion per year to keep over 2.5 million people in prison and keeps an additional 7.2 million under correctional control.

Perhaps most shocking is the racial bias of U.S. incarceration. "People of all colors use and sell drugs at similar rates, yet African-American adults are 10 times more likely than whites to go to prison on drug charges." (Michelle Alexander, "Cruel and unequal: How our penal system mass-produces second-class citizens," *Sojourners*, February 2011) Thirteen percent of illicit drug users are African Americans, but 35 percent of drug-related arrests are of African Americans.

In her book, *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander explains how "we have created a vast new legal system for racial and social control . . . a system that locks the majority of black men in many urban areas into a permanent underclass status." She traces this development back to the War on Drugs declared by President Ronald Reagan and the political strategy of "get tough" on drugs and crime, which has largely been defined racially. This strategy does not focus primarily on violent crime but on minor drug offenses. Such minor offences lead to underclass status for life: denial of jobs, access to public housing, food stamps, and a range of heavy fees, fines, court costs, and child support. Another factor is the rate of recidivism, which stands at 70 percent.

"The system of mass incarceration was born out of our nation's racially divisive politics." Both parties claimed to be "tough on crime," and this has led to an indifference to people caught in the system, "the others," who live in ghettoized communities and are considered to be less human and worse. The courts have "eviscerated the Fourth Amendment protections, rejecting claims of racial bias at every stage in the criminal justice process, from searches to sentencing." Harsher sentences and mandatory minimum sentences for minor drug offenses were established. What we now have is "a system that is irrational and counterproductive." Michelle Alexander, who has written extensively and powerfully on this subject, affirms, "We've got to change an entire mindset." (24)

"This is not a problem begging merely for policy reform. Much more is required of us. If we fail, as a nation, to awaken to the basic humanity of all those circling in and out of prison today, and if we fail to commit ourselves to ending mass incarceration, future generations will judge us harshly. A human rights nightmare is occurring on our watch."

**Consider the ways in which we can begin to change our mindset regarding the system of incarceration in this country**



## 500 YEARS OF OPPRESSION, PATRIARCHY, AND RACISM

Howard Zinn's book, *A People's History of the United States, 1492—Present*, has given us a "rereading" of U.S. history "from the underside," i.e. from the perspective of Native Americans, poor white serfs, African Americans, women, workers, and worldwide victims of U.S. "Manifest Destiny." It should be required reading, if not in schools and universities, certainly in our churches, as a necessary part of our education and preparation for life in this terribly unjust world.

From the beginning of our history there have been, of course, various mechanisms by which powerful and wealthy elites have gained and maintained and augmented their privileges at the expense of those at the bottom of the social and economic pyramids. White craftsmen and poor whites were invited to make common use of their racial "superiority" in exploitation and abuse of Blacks and Indians. White men exploited and abused both White and non-White women because of their gender "superiority." Periodically, concessions and compromises were made with middle class and other "inferiors" so that the rebellious sectors could be quelled and the basic socio-economic pyramids could be kept relatively stable.

Zinn analyzes the peculiar nature of the exploitation and oppression of women, who have been largely absent from earlier histories of our country. Among African and Native Americans and among the poor they have been doubly oppressed. And among all groups they were for so long given tasks as "a convenience for men, who could use, exploit, and cherish someone who was at the same time servant, sex mate, companion, and bearer-teacher-warden of his children." (102) In the early years "women were imported as sex slaves, child-bearers, companions." (103) Many came as indentured servants. Servant and slave girls were commonly abused sexually. Black slave women were often separated from their husbands and even from their children. According to the dominant cultural and religious ideology, women were expected to be subject to their husbands, to be occupied in the home and not in public affairs, to turn over their property to their husbands, and to be sexually pure, but the vicissitudes of life in the colonies and on the frontier often forced them to assume responsibilities on a par with men.

The struggle of Native North Americans is perhaps the most tragic of all. From the time of the original colonies, through the great White migrations across the Appalachian Mountains, on to the Rockies, and finally to the West Coast, the great Indian Nations have had their lands taken, their villages burned, their women raped, their cultures and religions vilified, their right to life denied. Their story is replete with official deceit and betrayal, massacres and forced removals, and endless treaties leading to genocide. It can be argued that the wars and skirmishes against the Native Peoples played a decisive role in the formation of the heroic, military, chauvinistic American mind that in the 20th Century has wrecked havoc on Third World peoples around the world through military intervention, secret operations, and economic imperialism.

The human cost of the slave system will forever be incalculable and incomprehensible, especially to Whites. The heritage of slavery in the U.S. psyche, both Black and White, may never be fully exorcised. By 1860 there were 4 million slaves in the South, producing enormous profits for their White owners, and there were 200,000 free Blacks in the North. The fruits of this iniquitous system are still being borne by the women, children, and men of Harlem, South Chicago, and South Central Los Angeles and also among the still largely White suburbs of all our cities, among rich and poor of both races whose humanity will be fundamentally deformed as long as this racism, sometimes referred to as America's original sin, persists.

**Consider what U.S. history might have been like if the Jubilee vision and mandates had--as some Native peoples, settlers, and freed slaves proposed--prevailed.**

## THE FALSE GOSPEL OF GLOBALIZATION

Cynthia Moe-Lobeda's article, "Refuting the False Gospel of Globalization" (*The Other Side*, November-December 2002, 16--21), presents and unmasks the myths that undergird economic globalization, which is so powerful in our lives today.

*The pathos of the situation stuns. Christians are called, before all else except love for God, to love neighbor as self. This is our gift and vocation, our primary lifework here on earth, and many of us long to fulfill it. Yet we find ourselves locked into a global political economy that structures exploitation into the very fabric of our lives. We do not wish to buy shirts made in sweatshops, coffee grown on land that should feed its hungry children, or metal products from mines that have displaced thousands of people. We are not pleased to be pumping toxins into our planetary home, destroying the life systems upon which life depends. Yet, we do.*

*Our lives are intimately bound up in a moral-spiritual crisis of profound and unprecedented dimensions. The reigning model of economic globalization threatens earth's life systems, undermines cultural integrity and diversity, and endangers the lives of many who are poor in order that some might consume exorbitantly and a few accumulate vast wealth.*

*A haunting dimension of that crisis is our acquiescence to the prevailing form of globalization. As a society, we do not seriously consider its long-term social and ecological implications. We fail to resist it and forge alternatives. Many of us, insulated by privilege, remain blind to the suffering and ecological devastation wrought by current global trade and investment regimes. Others, while aware, feel muted, dwarfed by the situation, and powerless to shape economic lifestyles and structures that enhance human and planetary flourishing.*

What specific myths or ideological presuppositions drive this system of domination?

*The first "market myth" undergirding economic globalization is that growth benefits all.*

*A second myth at the heart of global free-market ideology is that human freedom and market freedom are inseparably linked.*

*A third key myth in the prevailing paradigm of economic globalization holds that the human being is, above all, an economic being—homo economicus.*

*Finally, free-market ideology includes the myth that corporate-and-finance-driven globalization is inevitable.*

Never before has any economic system produced such polarization between the few rich and the many poor. Genuine human freedom is not based on private property unconcerned for the common good and unfettered by "public accountability, scrutiny, regulation, and responsibility." Human beings are not simply autonomous, competitive, consumeristic, self-centered subjects but rather beings-in-community. Corporate-led economic globalization is not inevitable; it can be resisted and changed.

1. What evidence of the truth of these myths do we find in the media and among friends?
2. What evidence of the falsehood of these myths can we offer?



## ABUNDANCE AND SCARCITY

*The majority of the world's resources pour into the United States. And as we Americans grow wealthier and wealthier, money is becoming a kind of narcotic for us. We hardly notice our own prosperity or the poverty of so many others. The great contradiction is that we have more and more money and less and less generosity—less and less public money for the needy, less charity for the neighbor.*

*Though many of us are well intentioned, we have invested our lives in consumerism. We have a love affair with “more”—and we will never have enough. Consumerism is not simply a marketing strategy. It has become a demonic spiritual force among us, and the theological question facing us is whether the gospel has the power to help us withstand it.*

*We must confess that the central problem of our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God's abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity—a belief that makes us greedy, mean, and unneighborly.*

Walter Brueggemann's essay, “The Liturgy of Abundance, the Myth of Scarcity” (*Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a Post-Christian World*, pp. 69-75, Fortress, 1999), draws a sharp contrast between the biblical message about God's abundant provision, beginning in the creation story (Genesis 1), and human fear of scarcity and propensity toward selfish accumulation, beginning with Pharaoh (Genesis 47). When the Hebrew slaves were liberated from the worst consequences of savage market capitalism, God's first major mandate on how to live in freedom was the lesson of the manna (Exodus 16). If only God's people could learn to share the bounty of God's provision, there would be enough for everyone. There would be justice. There would be *shalom*, abundant life for all.

Jesus taught and enacted the Kingdom of God as “public life reorganized toward neighborliness.” His parables are “subversive reimaginings of reality.” “Everywhere he went he broke the vicious cycles of poverty, bondage, fear, and death; he healed, transformed, empowered, and brought new life.” He enabled multitudes to eat abundantly out of their apparent scarcity simply by sharing, beginning with a few loaves and fishes. Jesus taught an alternative economics. He proclaimed the good news that we, too, can practice alternative economics and even create alternative institutions so that creation's abundance can, as God intends, provide enough for all.

**1. What are the signs of the rule of scarcity and accumulation in today's world? How are we caught up in this vision of economic reality?**

**2. What are the signs of God's abundance and generosity in today's world? How are we ourselves engaged in God's economy?**



## ADAM SMITH AND TAXES

Adam Smith, the author of *Wealth of Nations* (1776), is called the patron saint of private property, capitalism, and the free market. As Sam Fleischacker explains in an article for the *Los Angeles Times* (January 22, 2001), politicians often appeal to Smith, ignoring the fact that he argued that governments should impose taxes to pay for their services.

It is not surprising that taxes are unpopular or that politicians draw votes by promoting tax cuts. But it is reasonable to question the motives and arguments behind these appeals. Fleischacker notes that the cry, "It's your money" or "Don't let them take away your hard earned cash," ignores the fact that workers and businesses could not possibly earn or accumulate money without essential help from government or society as a whole.

*My efforts will fail if I am not protected against theft and attack, if there are no decent roads to and from my firm, if environmental blight or urban decay keeps people away from my retail outlet, or if the general population is so poorly educated, ill or despairing that my firm can find no customers or good workers. In this sense, my earnings are not purely "my" money. They are the product, rather, of a collaborative effort between me and my neighbors and political officials. And I owe some of the earnings back to the society and government agencies that have helped me.*

Adam Smith actually argued for a graduated income tax. He wrote:

*The subjects of every state ought to contribute toward the support of the government in proportion to their respective abilities; that is, in proportion to the revenue which they respectively enjoy under the protection of the state.*

Furthermore, Smith wrote that we should regard taxes not with suspicion but with pride.

*Every tax is to the person who pays it a badge, not of slavery, but of liberty. It denotes that he is subject to government, indeed, but that, as he has some property, he cannot himself be the property of a master.*

Finally, Fleischacker explains Smith's view of taxes and poverty: "One part of protecting liberty involves making sure that there is as little poverty as possible. Great poverty breeds crime, which interferes with everyone's liberty and of course prevents the poor themselves from having the mental or material resources to act with full freedom. Protecting freedom directly requires an investment at least in public education and public health, especially for pregnant mothers and young children." "Adam Smith has been misread for generations, and it is not news to scholars that he was a strong advocate for the poor. But it is disturbing that the silly notion that taxes are some sort of infringement on private property should be widespread two centuries after Smith died."

**Make your own analysis of taxes in terms of the Jubilee vision and mandates.**